

RCC NEWS

December 2023



From The Pastor's Pen ~ Pastor Sarah Flack



Merry Christmas, River Community Church Family and Friends!

On my way home from a meeting for area American Baptist pastors, I received a phone call from a church member who has headed to a warmer climate. He was calling to ask for prayer for a man he had met in a local store. This man had recently lost his wife and when our church member encountered him, in what I'm convinced was a God-designed meeting, this man was almost in tears. Our church member gave him a hug and offered to pray for him. He then called to ask that we pray for this man also. Those of you who are part of the prayer chain received that request on Monday. Thank you for praying for that grieving husband and for being part of the work God is doing in his life.

Two things especially gladdened my heart as I thought about this experience today:

1. What a privilege it was to be able to encourage and be a hope bringer to someone in a place not near Clayton. We may never meet this man or hear the outcome of his story this side of eternity, but God in His goodness still allowed us to be a small part of the man's story.
1. Prayer is so important, and I am thankful for the church member who wanted his brothers and sisters at River Community Church to pray with him for this man.

River Community Church, never discount the power of the seeds you are planting in the world around you. It matters. It brings glory to God. It shows what we believe and WHO we believe in. It is what we are meant to do as the Church, as followers of Jesus. We sow seeds of love, of kindness, of prayer, of hope, and as we point people to Jesus, our Father sees and Heaven rejoices.

It is easy to forget in the midst of all the sin and ugliness of the world that God and His goodness are still very much present. We light an advent candle each week this month to remind ourselves of the light we celebrate at Christmas, Jesus who came to be with us and to save us. Receive in your heart His words that are recorded in John 8:12:

12 Jesus spoke to them again: *"I am the light of the world. Anyone who follows Me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life."*

As followers of Jesus who have trusted in Him for salvation, we bear His light into the world...to grieving husbands, to weary mothers, to children who are lonely, to a lost world in need of hope. So go forth, River Community Church, wherever life may take you, and share the light of Jesus.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you believe so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Romans 15:13

Yours by the grace of Christ Jesus,
Pastor Sarah



Elder Ministry ~ Tom Augliano



Oh, the lights and the sounds of the Christmas season. We begin to "Deck the halls with boughs of holly...Tis the season to be jolly...and as we Troll the ancient Yuletide (Christmas season) carol, we can strike the harp and join the chorus - so follow me in merry measure, while I tell of Yuletide treasure - so, Let us sing we joyous all together, heedless of the wind and weather - Fa la la la la, la la la la." Yes, the Christmas Advent Season is here.

I started putting up our outside Christmas decorations and lights in early November, but I did obey the unwritten rule (if there really is one) of not turning them on until after Thanksgiving. However, I do have to admit that I started listening to Christmas music well before Thanksgiving. The Christmas songs and music we all grew up with over the years have a special meaning to each of us, and both their melodies and lyrics have a familiarity that reminds us of past Christmas seasons with loved ones and friends that we shared those seasons with. I've always loved Nat King Cole's singing of "The Christmas Song" and the last verse chorus: "And so I'm offering this simple phrase, to kids from one to 92...Although it's been said many times, many ways, Merry Christmas to you."

Growing up, my parents loved to listen to the familiar Christmas songs sung by Berle Ives, the Andrews Sisters, Bing Crosby, Perry Como, Peggy Lee, Andy Williams, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, etc., often accompanied with the big band and orchestra sounds...and when I hear each year: "I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas", "It's Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas", "Jingle Bells", "Frosty the Snowman", and so many others, I'm always reminded of past Christmas seasons, as well as this Christmas season that God has blessed me with. Growing up in Clayton, we would do a majority of our Christmas shopping in Watertown, and in the 1950's and 60's most of the stores were located on Public Square in downtown Watertown, with F.W. Woolworth store being the largest retailer. We also had some nice stores in Clayton, and you could place an order at one of the "catalogue" stores. Each season we would get the Sears, JC Penny, and the Montgomery Ward Catalogues sent to our house, and they were "thick." (We didn't need to work out with weights back then, because we could just bench press and arm curl those catalogues.) It sure was a different era, and when I hear the familiar Christmas carols it certainly takes me back to that time.

But amid the memories, the joy and the laughter, we also often experience a feeling of melancholy at Christmas, because everyone's not with us. We have family members, church family and friends who have either passed on, or due to other life circumstances, won't be with us this Christmas. Steven Curtis Chapman in his Christmas song, "Wonderful" not only reflects on this feeling, but also the hope found in Jesus so that we can make this Christmas truly "Wonderful." Here are the lyrics to this song:

"It's the time of year when happiness and cheer won't be enough to get me through the night. I need a Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace - who's strong enough to carry me - Immanuel, God with us, the one whose love will never end...Oh, Jesus, can you make the season Wonderful. Almighty in a manger, told us he'd be no stranger to all our sorrow and all the hurt we'll ever know. So let these gifts remind us, how Love came down to find us - Wonder of the ages - The Life, the Truth, the Way! For unto us a child is born (Wonderful); For unto us a Son is given (Wonderful); and He will live and He will die to conquer death and bring us life. Forever He will be our Wonderful Counselor, the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace, who's strong enough to carry me - Immanuel - God with us! The One whose love will never end - Oh, Jesus, You are ...WONDERFUL".

Oh, the Light, and the Sounds of Christmas! Now let me tell you what really brings me Joy, and Peace, and Hope during the Christmas Season: God's Word, the beautiful Christian Christmas carols that bring us into the presence of God (Worship), and the Biblical account of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem. "Joy to the World", "Away in a Manger", "Hark the Herald", "O Holy Night", "Silent Night", and the list goes on. These Christmas Carols speak to the true Light of Christmas: Heaven coming to earth - Our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ, our Messiah.

"In Him was life, and that life was the Light of all mankind. The Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it... Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, children not born of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us. We have seen His glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1; 4-5, 12-14)

The True Light of Christmas is Salvation and Redemption through Jesus Christ. God loves us so much that He sent and gave us His only begotten Son, *"that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but will have everlasting life."*(John 3:16) Later, Jesus, in announcing His purpose in coming said this: *"For the Son of man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."*(Luke 19:10) This is the True Light of the Christmas season - God with us - Emmanuel - He has come for you and me.

Oh, the sounds of Christmas: Multitudes of angels rejoicing at the birth of our Savior. As we look at the Biblical narrative in Luke (Ch. 2), the Christmas Carol, "Do You Hear What I Hear?" comes to mind. But first, let's read from Luke 2, starting with vs 8: *"Now there were in the same country shepherds who were abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And, lo, the Angel of the Lord came upon them, the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were greatly afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a SAVIOR (the Messiah), the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: you will find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."*

The greatest event in the history of the world has just taken place here. God has taken on human form and has come for all of us to save and redeem us. "Said the little lamb to the shepherd boy: Do you hear what I hear? Ringing through the sky, shepherd boy, Do you hear what I hear? A song, a song, high above the trees with a voice as big as the sea...with a voice as big as the sea." Oh, the Sound of Christmas, and the multitude of heavenly hosts singing and praising God with a JOY and a shout of GLORY to God in the Highest, announcing the birth of the new born King! "Said the king to the people everywhere: Listen to what I say! Pray for peace, people everywhere! Listen to what I say: The Child, the Child, sleeping in the night, He will bring us goodness and light; He will bring us goodness and light." (From the carol: Do You Hear What I Hear?)

When a very pregnant Mary and her espoused husband Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, about 70 miles, (as was required of them to register for the census to be taken), there was no room at the Inn for them to stay. Mary then delivered and gave birth to the Christ Child where they kept the animals... in a stable... in a manger. And that child is the fulfillment of God's promise. This Child had His first cry and gone to sleep there in Bethlehem, in a manger.

This Christmas Carol speaks so beautifully to this night: "Silent Night, Holy Night, All is calm, All is bright; Round yon virgin, mother and Child; Holy infant so tender and mild; sleep in heavenly peace. Silent night, Silent night! Son of God, Love's pure light. Radiant beams from Thy holy face; With dawn of redeeming grace. JESUS, Lord at Thy Birth; JESUS, Lord at Thy birth." Another Carol that speaks to the Awe and Wonder of the virgin birth of Jesus is "What Child Is This" especially vs 4: "This, this is Christ the King, Whom shepherds guard and angels sing; Haste, haste to bring Him laud, The Babe, the Son of Mary.

But there is another sound during the Christmas season that for me just speaks to my Spirit and I hope yours also - the Christmas Carol, "O Holy Night": "O Holy Night, the stars are brightly shining, it is the night of our dear Savior's birth. Long lay the world in sin and error pining, Til He appeared, and the soul felt its worth. A thrill of HOPE - a weary world REJOICES - FOR YONDER BREAKS A NEW AND GLORIOUS MORN (salvation and new birth)! Fall on your knees; O hear the angel voices: O NIGHT DIVINE! O NIGHT WHEN CHRIST WAS BORN! O NIGHT! O NIGHT DIVINE! Let all within us PRAISE HIS HOLY NAME!"

Oh, the Light and the Sound, and the Wonder and the Awe of Christmas!! It's found in receiving and opening the gift of Salvation and Redemption in CHRIST JESUS, OUR LORD, SAVIOR AND MESIAH. Yes, new birth. Yes, In Christ Jesus, we are HOPE BRINGERS!

"And although it's been said many times, many ways: Merry Christmas to you".

In Christ, Tom Augliano





Grief Ministry ~ Laura Schafer



Christmas and Grief

Most people think of Christmas as a joyful time of year. Unfortunately, this is not the case with everyone. Did you know that December 25th is the peak time of year for reports of depression and attempts at suicide?

Everyone has suffered some sort of loss and the heartache and pain that comes along with it. Research shows that people who have suffered a significant loss, whether it be the loss of a loved one, the loss of a job or the loss of health, find the holidays the hardest times to get through.

It is common for people to think of the holidays as a time to gather with family. For those who have lost someone however, the holidays are another reminder that their loved one is no longer here and a reminder of their loneliness. If the loss is recent, those grieving have to anticipate the first Christmas without their loved one. We have been taught that grieving is normal and healthy, but that does not remove the fact that it is painful. Faced with the inevitable reminder of loss that Christmas brings, many fall into depression.

There are many examples of grief and loss in the Bible. Job suffered terrible losses and asked why? Jeremiah saw and warned the people concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, but no one listened. His book of Lamentations is a long and bitter account of his grief and tears over this. Paul, pleaded with God to remove a "thorn in his flesh" to no avail. In the end he had to accept God's purpose for his suffering. Jesus offered intense prayers to God to have the agony of the cross removed, so intense that drops of blood dripped from His forehead. He then accepted God's will. (Luke 22:44)

All of these people and more experienced the pain of grief and loss. As humans our suffering is the same, and the way God ministers to us during these times is the same as well. Our trials never go unnoticed by God. God provides His constant love, (Romans 8:35-39) God comforts us. (Philippians 4:7) God is our hope. (John 16:20) And the greatest hope to those who believe and respond to Jesus with faith, expressed in repentance (Mark 16:16), have the guarantee that whatever causes grief now will be swallowed up in victory with eternal life with God.

Those of you who are finding the holiday season difficult, find your peace in Christ and reach out to your Brothers and Sisters in Christ to travel your journey by your side (Ecclesiastes 4:10). If you are blessed beyond measure this holiday season and not yourself grieving, look around you and reach out to the person who is alone and grieving this holiday season. You may be placed in their life for such a time as this.

May we all feel Christ's love and peace this holiday season.



Women's Ministry - The Circle ~ Wendy Falzano & Charlotte Frese



Mmmm!!!

Many kitchens are filled with mouth watering aromas this time of year. The cold and the holidays often promote indoor baking and cooking.

At last month's gathering, we made apples pies to bring home and cook. This year my crust didn't seem to go as easy as in the past. However, my sisters' pies came out wonderfully.

Check out the pictures and judge for yourself. Oh and soooo good!!!

Thank you Char Frese for the pie making lessons and all the baking tips.



This month we will have our Christmas Cookie Exchange on Saturday, 12/16 @ 10:00.

Bring 3 dozen cookies; two dozen to exchange and one to share as samples. Also, if possible, please bring a new pair of socks, or gently used blanket that we will be donating to a local homeless shelter.

First, we will have our time of gathering and then we will have the exchange. I know some of you may have to leave early to participate in the Christmas Carol singing at the mall, so we will try to finish up by 11:30.

(If you haven't signed up yet and are interested see Terence Falzano the worship team leader to get the details or come to the rehearsal on 12/13 at 6:15 pm)

I want to thank Char and Lillian for all their work in organizing, collecting and delivering the Operation Christmas Child boxes for and to Samaritan Purse. They collected just short of 50 boxes!! Thanks to all those who participated!

For more information, suggestions, or questions about any of the gatherings or organizing a gathering, contact Char Frese (315)221-1303 or Wendy Falzano (518)526-6149.

Char and I will be meeting the beginning of January to try to put together a tentative schedule of events for the upcoming year.

If you have any suggestions or want to join the team, please reach out to us.

Just a reminder, this is meant to be a time of fellowship for you. Let us know your interests and ideas or better yet, come join our team in facilitating the gatherings. Let us know so we can include you in the planning meeting.

As we prepare for the Christmas Holidays, there is often so much to do. Let's be diligent in preparing our hearts during this Advent season for the celebration of the birth of our Savior.

(If you have not already gotten the Advent Devotional that is available, you can reach out to the church office to get a copy 315-686-3194).

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel...(which means "God with us"). Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23





Worship Ministry ~ Terence Falzano



Matthew 2:1-2 "1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, 2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

We are worshipping as a Christmas outreach on Saturday, December 16, 2023 at 1 PM in the Salmon River Mall.

This year we will be setting up at the head of the food court, around the corner from Best Buy.

We hope to sing approximately 15 Christmas hymns with a 15 minute break. The entire outreach might be an hour and a half with prayer and shares.

We will be closing with the Lord's Prayer.

Please wear a red or green top and black pants. Please bring water or something to drink.

Please bring your music. Please arrive at 12:45 so we can set up the chairs.

Please attend a 1 hour rehearsal Wednesday evening at 6:15 PM, December 13, 2023.

The worship is praying for musicians who play piano, guitar, bass and who possess a desire to serve the Lord Christ Jesus through music worship.

Please reach out to me to schedule a conversation / interview / audition at:

terencefalzano@riverchurchnny.com

In Christ Jesus's joy!





Breaking The Chains Biblical Recovery Ministry ~ Ken & Michelle Kavanagh



When I was a child, the sights and sounds of Christmas were exciting for me. I loved winter, and still do. Even though the thought of receiving a gift was exciting, gathering with my family and watching the change in people throughout the season filled my heart and made a lasting impression with me that has stayed with me as I grew older. It seemed like, for a moment, the joy and love of Christ filled the hearts of people which gave others a measure of hope when going through difficult situations because they saw first hand the love of Christ working through people. I sometimes still think “why can’t this last all year long?”

As I got older and lived life, I understood how difficult it can be to have that joyous feeling, even at Christmas time, when we are dealing with difficult situations. It wasn’t until I went through some of those difficult situations did I understand how someone can feel anxious, depressed, lonely, fearful, worried and even angry. Sometimes we are struggling with illness, financial difficulties/job loss, family/marriage problems, loss of a loved one or mistreatment by others. Sometimes it could even be thoughts of something that happened long ago that we can’t let go of. These emotions, if not dealt with, can turn into bitterness, hate, or lead to addiction. For some, they feel stuck, like there is no way out, and decide to end their life. Though these are not happy thoughts to read (or write) about, it may help us to be aware of those around us when we see others who are struggling or are unhappy. What we are seeing in their anger, fear, depression, or anxiety is pain, and like an infected wound that has not been treated, that wound within the heart can run deep and the pain can be unbearable and the worries can seem endless.

But praise God we have a righteous King, Jesus, who can heal the wounds and take care of our problems! He is our healer:

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. (Psalm 147:3)

He is our Counselor:

6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. (Isaiah 9:6)

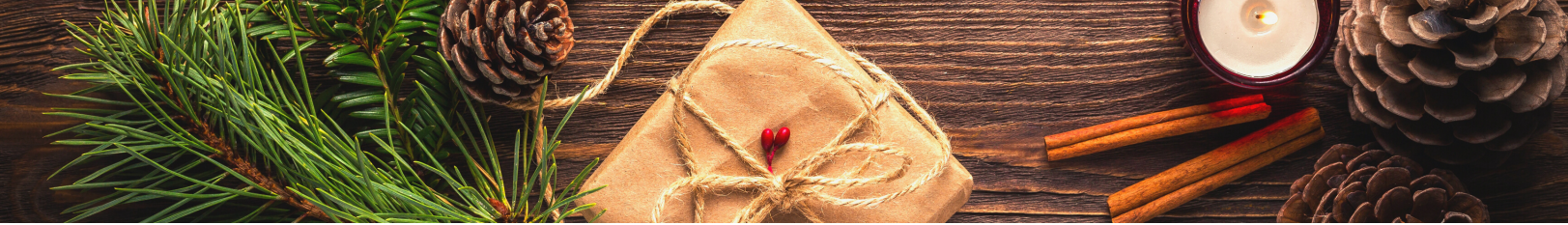
And He wants you to hand over your burdens and concerns so you can have that joy and peace He promises to give:

28 “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” (Matthew 11:28-30)

If you are struggling at this time, what is stopping you from turning your heart and problems over to Christ? It only takes a moment to sit with Him and bring it before Him, admitting you can’t handle this alone and then trust that He will help you.

If you know someone who is struggling, it only takes a moment to pray for that person every time you think of them and continue reminding them when you see them that we have a Savior that will help them and heal them if they put their trust in Him.

Today, turn it all over to Christ. Today, be that light in someone’s darkness and bring Christ into their situation.



Samaritan's Purse Operation Christmas Child by: Charlotte Freese



What a blessing it was for Lillian Green and I to start our church's campaign for this worthy organization. It sends filled shoe boxes to children throughout the world at Christmas time to spread the good news of the love of Jesus.

The goal of Samaritan's Purse this year was to receive 11 million boxes. I have noticed in the past that when there is a need, our church's congregation always supply beyond that need. That happened here. Lillian and I were hoping to get a total of 25 boxes. Well church family, we received a total of 46 boxes. We also raised a total of \$400.00 to ship 40 boxes.

Thank you to all that paid online for their box and to all of you that donated \$10.00 for a box to be shipped. Thank you for those of you that prayed for these boxes to go to the child it was meant for and for each child to accept Jesus as their Lord.

What a wonderful outreach this is. Thank you all for your participation, whether it was packing a box, paying for shipping for a box, or praying for the recipients of the boxes.

"He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." ~ Mark 16:15

Charlotte Freese





Emergency Preparedness
Are You Ready?



Types of Disasters Part II

FLOOD

Before a flood

1. Check out flood insurance in your area
2. Build an emergency kit and family communications plan
3. Avoid building in a floodplain unless you elevate and reinforce your home.
4. Elevate the furnace, water heater and electric panel in your home if you live in an area that has a high flood risk.
5. Consider installing "check valves" to prevent flood water from backing up into the drains of your home.
6. If feasible, construct barriers to stop floodwater from entering the building and seal walls in basements with waterproofing compounds.

During a flood

1. Listen to radio or tv for emergency information
2. If there is any possibility of a flash flood, move to higher ground and don't wait for instructions.
3. Be aware of streams, drainage channels and canyons and any other areas known to flood quickly.

If you must prepare to evacuate, do the following:

1. Secure your home. Bring in outdoor furniture and move essentials to an upper floor.
2. Turn off utilities at the main switches and valves if instructed to do so. Disconnect electrical appliances.
Do not touch electrical equipment if you are wet or standing in water.

If you have to leave your home, remember these evacuation tips:

1. Do not walk through moving water. Six inches of moving water can make you fall. If you have to walk in water, walk where the water is not moving. Use a stick to check the firmness of ground in front of you.
2. Do not drive into flooded areas. If floodwaters rise around your car, abandon the car and move to higher ground if you can do so safely. You and the vehicle can be swept away quickly.
3. Do not camp or park your vehicle along streams, rivers or creeks, particularly during threatening conditions.

After the Flood

Your home has been flooded. Although floodwaters may be down in some areas, many dangers still exist. Here are some things to remember in the days ahead:

- Flash floods can occur. Use local alerts and warning systems to get information and expert informed advice as soon as available.
- Avoid moving water.
- Stay away from damaged areas unless your assistance has been specifically requested by police, fire, or relief organization.
- Emergency workers will be assisting people in flooded areas. You can help them by staying off the roads and out of the way.
- Return home only when authorities indicate it is safe.
- Be aware of areas where floodwaters have receded. Roads may have weakened and could collapse under the weight of a car.



We'd like to thank all who participated in filling out Christmas cards for the troops. With your help, RCC mailed out to the USASOA organization a total of 101 Christmas cards!

Thank you for supporting our troops!



**"You Rick"
Award
Wanda Collins**

We are pleased to present the "You Rick" award to Wanda Collins for her dedication to posting online devotionals on a daily basis.

Wanda Collins, YOU RICK!



Just a Reminder...
There will be no Community Dinner in December. The next dinner will be January 15, 2024.



- 12/02 Ariana Augliano
- 12/03 Bonita Shafer
- 12/03 Lillian Green
- 12/12 Amber Augliano
- 12/12 Georgia Veith
- 12/24 Edy Kempney



- 12/13 Ken & Michelle Kavanagh



Church Humor

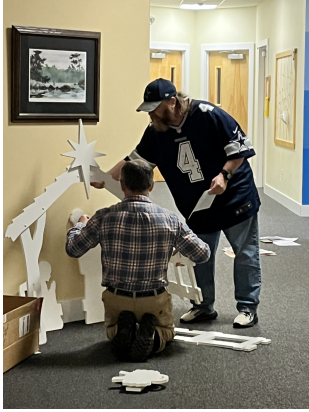
Thank you, Ken, for the chuckle!



After forgetting her Bible for worship service, Marge was thankful for the church's new vending machines.



Thank you to everyone who came and helped with the church decorating. It was a great time of fellowship, food and fun.



River families recently were invited to make family Advent candle holders. Several families gathered to make their candleholders at church with others taking a family kit home. We look forward to more family gatherings to come!

